DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 277 530 RC 016 061

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TITLE American Indian Studies: An Overview and Prospectus.
PUB DATE 85
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT Wicazo Sa Review; v1 n2 p15-21 Fall 1985

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Education; American Indians; *American Indian Studies; *College Curriculum; College Programs; *Cultural Differences; Culture Conflict; *Educational Change; Educational Innovation; Educational Needs; Educational Philosophy; Higher Education; *Intellectual Disciplines; Program Content; Program Design; *Program Implementation

ABSTRACT

American Indian Studies (AIS) faces many problems in its attempt to emerge as an academic discipline, but several activities, individuals, and concepts offer possible solutions. AIS is a conceptually rudderless discipline, isolated both within the academic environment and from its cultural roots, and functioning as career ladder for those who wish to "work with Indians" rather than providing intellectual pursuits for Indians themselves. The chief conceptual difficulty in creating an AIS discipline is the Euroamerican orientation of standard academic curricula with its "white studies" and European-derived processes and standards. Current programs and practitioners providing a basis for future development of AIS include: AIS programs in colleges/universities in 22 states; emergence of AIS focused and controlled journals offering autonomous scholarly publishing; efforts to establish independent AIS-controlled book publishing enterprises; three generations of competent and innovative practitioners within and outside academic settings. The essential missing requirements for emergence of AIS as a discipline is a coherent alternative to "white studies." Efforts toward this include insistence on articulation of Native American perspectives vis-a-vis the content of various disciplines, developing political and legal themes within a more Indian-specific depth, and cooperation with new internationalist Indian organizations which offer more universalized and less self-serving forums. (LFL)

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American Indian Studies: An Overview and Prospectus

by M. Annette Jaimes

The emergence of American Indian Studies (AIS) over the past 20 years has heralded a sense of optimism among many observers as to the multicultural pluralism of contemporary higher education in the United States. Yet, while there have been numerous noteworthy achievements on the part of AIS practitioners over the years, it seems questionable at this point whether the discipline has ever managed (or been allowed) to live up to its potential.

One is drawn to Russell Thornton's 1981 observation that AIS has historically been a "reactive discipline" in that "it criticized existing bodies of knowledge . . . particularly those of anthropology and history . . . (rather than) develop its own positive, unique directions."[1] It is difficult to disagree with his conclusion that, "the problems and needs of [AIS] as a discipline . . . must be faced continuously if [it] is to grow and develop,"[2] a sentiment recently echoed by Vine Deloria, Jr. and Clifford M. Lytle in their call for Indian intellectuals to focus upon autonomous "cultural renewal."[3]

Many of the conceptual difficulties presently confronting AIS seem bound up in the nature of its origins within a number of private, landgrant colleges on the East Coast: Harvard, William and Mary, Princeton and Dartmouth, among others. It was the role of these institutions to "civilize" the Indian, inculcating the perspective of Europe at the expense of indigenous worldview; Indian graduates were generally educated to become mental non-Indians.[4] As Thornton describes it, the colonial indoctrination process established a context of "Indian education" in which AIS inevitably became "a loose configuration of disciplines

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(particularly anthropology, history and law), or Indian cultures (especially Indian languages, art and music) and of contemporary issues and problems of Indian peoples..."[5]

This tendency is aptly summed up that AIS, as it is generally known, amounts to little more than "a concentration on teaching and service activities, not on scholarly functions characteristic of other disciplines. Consequently, [AIS] is really only a quasi-discipline, and its existence as a separate area within academics is therefore problematic."[6]

Thornton's notion of modern AIS as typically constituting little more than a "glorified vo-tech" through which students pass, "punching curriculum tickets," en route to meeting social service career requirements is hardly without merit.[7] It is substantially validated by the fact that many of the best and brightest of today's Indian students shy away from engaging in AIS expressly because of its "lack of substance" and "the stigma attached" while non-Indians (both students and faculty) flesh out the rosters.[8] Many of these non-Indians enroll specifically to fulfill credentialing requirements for entry into one or another government agency whose service delivery to Native Americans has failed spectacularly during the 1980's, largely because of insensitivity to the realities of Indian life exhibited by these former AIS students.[9]

Such a view receives further reinforcement from the experience of Educational Development Programs (EOPs), efforts undertaken during the late 1960's—the veritable heyday of AIS and other ethnic studies programs—and designed to facilitate greater "minority" access to/retention in higher education. Under a broad definition of their mission, the EOPs nationally held an arguable potential to serve as natural allies, consolidators of the academic gains achieved by more formally described (but embryonic) academic departments such as AIS.

Such possibilities were, however, blunted or negated by administrative constraints very early on. As Ward Churchill has noted in this connection, "The campus role of EOPs has gravitated to that of providing non-academic services, such as counseling and social cohesion/organization to the respective minority student populations. Top level institutional support for the creation of full-scale viable academic units within the minority context has never been evident."[10]

In 1985, then, it seems that AIS exists as a conceptually rudderless discipline, generally isolated both within the academic environment and from its cultural roots, and functioning all-too-often as career ladder for those who wish to "work with Indians" rather than as an intellectual pursuit of Indians themselves. Insofar as these factors hold true, AIS must be viewed as being essentially cooptive of Indian interests rather than as a discipline designed and intended to meet Indian needs.

Conceptual Difficulties

The central dilemma of AIS today was summed up neatly by Marlys Duchene when she observed that, "the fact is that the designers of standard academic curricula were Euroamericans. This resulted in academic curricula that embodied beliefs and routines that were strictly Euroamerican, the basis of which provided the 'object' for self-reflection, therefore being western European heritage, not American tribal heritage."[11] Elsewhere, Duchene continues that, as a consequence, "no textbook treats the history and culture of tribal people as part of the total history of the races of man."[12]

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In this vein, Vine Deloria, Jr. has noted with reference to AIS that, "the process of developing these programs took a traditional Anglo-American mode . . . [which] produced an objectification of [Indian] cultures and they became the consumers of their own products."[13] This situation prompted me, in an earlier essay on AIS, to consider the existence of a "myth of Indian education in the American educational system."[14]

The problem at issue here was perhaps most graphically described by Ward Churchill when he articulated the "educational imperialism" inherent to the contemporary functioning of academe (which he terms "white studies"). Within Churchill's schema, the "linear conceptual mode" marking European culture dominates modern US academic life, extracting conformity to its structuration and conclusions as the price of

intellectual legitimacy. Truly Indian intellectualism, which Churchill defines as being structured in a "circulinear" fashion, and belonging to the tradition of "the relational indigenous worldview," is thus excluded virtually by institutional mandate.[15]

> As currently established the University system in the [US] offers little more than presentations of "white studies" to students, mainstream and minority alike. This is to say that curriculum is very nearly monolithic in its focus upon European conceptual modes as being the "natural" formation of knowledge/means of perceiving reality. In the vast bulk of curriculum content, Europe is not only the subject (conceptual mode; process of learning to think), but the object (subject matter) of investigation as well.[16]

Deloria concurs with Churchill's assessment that the price of AIS's existence has generally been its intellectual subordination to, and often incorporation into the academic "mother country" of Europe-derived processes and "standards" when he concludes that, "in the past two decades we have witnessed a classic and profound misunderstanding that requires a certain degree of sophistication to recognize, and a misunderstanding that finds its roots in the historic relationship between Indians and western Europeans that originates in their divergent philosophical views of the world . . . a misunderstanding based upon the link between education and imperialism."[17]

Clearly, these sorts of issues offer a key to understanding both the scope and scale of constraints hindering (or barring) much of the potential range of accomplishments promised by AIS to date, and give immediate credence to Russell Thornton's historical description of the discipline as being "endogenous."[18] At first glance, such barriers to success no doubt appear so entrenched and all-powerful as to be insurmountable. However, the fact that a perceptive and steadily growing number of AIS practitioners have begun to come to grips with such fundamental conceptual problems gives rise to the hope that eventually the difficulties may be overcome; AIS, despite a large number of missed directions and false starts since 1965, can ultimately come into its own as an autonomous *Indian* tradition of intellectualism.

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The Basis for Development

Much of the basis for the future development of AIS lies, of course, in the programs and practitioners currently in existence. *The College Bluebook* indicates that by the early '80s sixteen states reported major public institutions possessing programs which, by definition, might be considered as AIS,[19] and the inclusion of private institutional programs adds at least six more states to the list.[20] In its 1980 directory to AIS programs, the Indian program at the University of New Mexico listed nine universities with formally defined AIS research centers (most committed to "teaching and service" activities; only Arizona State University broke this pattern with its Native American Languages and Bilingual Center).[21]

Two AIS programs, at Pennsylvania State University and Arizona State University respectively, report fielding "American Indian Leadership Fellowship Programs," intentionally designed to develop college educated "cadres" from among "the best and brightest" Indian students nationally. Although these programs have been specifically criticized for contributing to the emergence of "an Indian elite" rather than meeting the needs of "the people back home,"[22] it must be noted that the model they deploy could — if handled somewhat differently — be utilized to pursue a truly Indian academic agenda.

Another hopeful sign is the recent emergence of AIS focused and controlled journals such as *The American Indian Culture and Research Journal* at UCLA, Indian Studies at Cornell, and *Wicazo Sa Review* at Eastern Washington University. While such efforts are insufficient in themselves to offset the ideologically motivated suppression of divergent Native American nonfictional writing noted by Churchill and others,[23] they can be seen as the viable beginnings of an independent forum within which AIS practitioners may publish according to the autonomous scholarly criteria rather than by the standards established by

external (and often conflicting) disciplinary establishments.

To date, no independent AIS oriented book publishing enterprise has been accomplished despite efforts undertaken in this direction by James R. Young at UCLA and Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz at the University of New Mexico (as Ward Churchill has elsewhere noted, apparent AIS oriented book publishing programs, such as those at the Universities of Oklahoma and Nebraska are actually non-Indian historical/anthropological undertakings rather than AIS efforts per se).[24] Nonetheless, the accomplishments of the present AIS journals and the importance of the few real AIS generated books which have been released thus far would seem to point in the direction of autonomous AIS book publishing becoming an eventual reality.

Finally, in terms of present resources pointing to the future positive evolution of AIS, it must be said that the discipline has demonstrated not only continuity but growth in terms of committed, competent, and innovative practitioners. In this sense, AIS may be said to have matured into its second (or possibly third) generation. The first generation—comprised of such notables as Vine Deloria, Jr., N. Scott Momaday, Robert K. Thomas, Jeanette Henry Costo, Russell Thornton, and Roger Buffalohead—generally remain active. However, these "senior statesmen" of AIS have been joined by "young turks" such as Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, Churchill, Jose Barreiro, Winona LaDuke, John Mohawk, and William Oandasan (to name but a few).* And, lately, the scholars and intellectuals working directly within the academic AIS setting have been increasingly joined by others working outside the academic setting; establishing a broader context, as it were. These include Maurice Kenny, Joy Harjo, Peter Blue Cloud, Jimmie Durham, Ingrid el Allissa, and Alex Jacobs. In effect, as John Mohawk has described it, "a true Indian intelligentsia is beginning to emerge."[25]

All in all, earlier noted problems notwithstanding, the present development of AIS offers a firm basis programatically, in terms of emerging forums and by virtue of the individuals actively involved in its functioning, for the full-fledged fruition of its initial promise before the end of this century. What seems still lacking at this point is a coherent alternative conceptualization to the "white studies" status quo, and the content or subject matter which would necessarily accompany such a vision.

An Alternative Vision

There has for some time been a call for the actualization of "concrete examples of . . . Native American conceptual structures . . . successfully integrated within mainstream curriculum components" of the university,[26] among certain practitioners of AIS. In essence, this has been a call for insistence upon the articulation of Native American perspectives *vis-a-vis* the content of various disciplines and without adherence to the academic strictures specific to those disciplines (e.g., Native American philosophy is philosophy in its own right, and not only by virtue of juxtaposition to the philosophy of Plato or Hegel). Further, it has been a call for the demand that such articulation(s) be accepted in their own right within academe, rather than by way of measuring up to the standards of others.

At base, such a trajectory is linked (both in formulation and in spirit) with both the principles of psychic/intellectual decolonization long espoused by such theorists as Frantz Fanon,[27] and the more recently emerging perspective of "indigenism" articulated by writer/activists such as Guillermo Bonfil Batalla.[28]

In practice, much of the recent work by AIS young turks has tended not to negate, but to go beyond certain pioneering efforts undertaken by the discipline's senior statesmen. For example, much of Michael Melody's work can be seen as picking up thematics posited by Vine Deloria, Jr. in *God is Red* (and to an extent, in *The Metaphysics of Modern Existence*), developing them in a more coherently political fashion and in more Indian-specific depth.[29]

Again, much of Ward Churchill's recent work has been to take aspects of Deloria's legal logic, lifting it from the context of US domestic law and re-deploying it within the context of international law.[30] In this, he is operating more

or less in tandem with non-academic writer/activists such as Jimmie Durham[31] and, to a certain extent, with academics such as Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz.[32] The latter, in her own right, has done much to push an historical revision, written from a sophisticated indigenous perspective, of the development of North American nation-states into print.[33]

In such efforts, the young turks are, to a much greater extent than the earlier generation of AIS practitioners, operating in concert with new internationalist Indian organizations such as the International Indian Treaty Council, the Indian Law Resource Center, and the World Council on Indigenous Peoples. In this, they find their theoretics and research subjected to a much more universalized scrutiny than did their predecessors, and benefit from a much broader intellectual forum (one which is much freer of the hegemony of the self-serving and self-justifying aspects of US academia).

Hence, while it cannot be said that anything like a fully developed alternative vision upon which to ground the outlook and content of AIS now exists, such a vision can be seen to be developing steadily, even rapidly, at this point. As the process continues, it would seem to necessarily follow that many of the intellectual truisms of the dominant culture, truisms which have been incorporated into and have hindered the development of AIS thus far, will be discarded. They will then be replaced by thinking, positions, and curriculum contents more authentically effective of contemporary Indian life and more responsive to modern Indian need. Needless to say, little more can or should be asked of an academic discipline than this.

Conclusion

As Russell Thornton stated in his 1980 keynote address to the Fourth Annual Conference on Contemporary American Indian Issues," the future for [AIS] is open . . . [either to] blend into other disciplines . . . or become mere components . . . *or* [AIS] could emerge completely as a discipline, unique and distinct in higher education."[34] It is this distinctly contradictory set of options which Jose Barriero has termed "the dilemma in American Indian education,"[35] and which has tended to frustrate the potential of AIS since the onset.

Today, however, both the material and intellectual foundations clearly exist by which AIS can come into its own, to create the matrix of knowledge for American Indians which Ron LaFrance has called "the symbology of development,"[36] to become a true source of Native American education rather than a mere appendage of Euroamerican colonial indoctrination. The seeds planted in the 1960's have, despite all odds, sprouted, grown, and may well be preparing to bear fruit.

This brief survey of "the state of things" in AIS has attempted to sketch both problems and possible solutions confronted by the discipline. As with any study of this sort, it does not—indeed, cannot—purport to offer a comprehensive analysis of its subject matter. Rather, it is intended to provide a capsule orientation to the complexity of the issues and dynamics involved, to open the door to further consideration and discussion of the topics raised.

AIS and its future is a subject of the utmost importance to all of us involved in and concerned with American Indian affairs. For this reason, the reader is urged to pursue further investigation, perhaps beginning with the materials cited in the end notes of this essay. Ultimately, it is within the crucible of informed dialogue that the future of AIS will be determined.

**The terms "senior statesmen" and "young turks" are not intended to convey the chronological ages of those thus described. Rather, they are meant to connote the relative lengths of time they have been visible participants in the AIS arena.*

(Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of perspectives on the "state of things" in AIS.)

End Notes

1 Thornton, Russell, "American Indian Studies as an Academic Discipline: A Revisit," *American Indian Issues in Higher Education*, American Indian Studies Center, UCLA, 1981, p. 6. This essay was the keynote address at the 4th Annual Conference on Contemporary American Indian Issues, UCLA, 1980.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

3 Deloria, Vine Jr., and Clifford M. Lytle, *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty*; New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, pp. 250-254.

4 Thornton, Russell, "American Indian Studies as an Academic Discipline," *The American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, Vol. 2, Nos. 3-4, American Indian Studies Center, UCLA, 1978, p. 10.

5 Thornton, 1981, op. cit., p. 5.

6 Thornton, 1978, op. cit., p. 10.

7 The somewhat colorful language in this passage accrues from a speech delivered by Russell Means at American Indian Awareness Week, University of Colorado/Boulder, April, 1980.

8 This information accrues from an independent survey conducted in 1979 by the National Tribal Chariman's Fund, Boulder, CO, under the direction of Ms. Patricia Locke. The data revealed that, among responding departments, upwards of one-third of all AIS enrolled students identified as "caucasian," while nearly 20% were of other non-Indian ethnic groups; more than two-thirds of rostered faculty were caucasian.

9 This conclusion is derived from an unpublished study of Indian service employment patterns conducted by ACKO, Inc., Boulder, CO, during the period 1977-79 under direction of Ms. Sarah Sneed.

10 Churchill, Ward, "National Patterns in Contemporary Indian Studies Programs," *Multicultural Education and the American Indian*, American Indian Studies Center, UCLA, 1979, p. 59.

11 Duchene, Marlys, "Problems in Curriculum Development in Indian Community Schools," unpublished position paper presented at the Western Social Sciences Conference, Albuquerque, NM, 1980 (p. 3).

12 Duchene, Marlys, "The Relevancy of Indian Studies in Higher Education," *American Indian Issues in Higher Education*, American Indian Studies Ctr., UCLA, 1981, p. 15.

13 Deloria, Vine Jr., "The Rise and Fall of Ethnic Studies," *Cultural Pluralism in Education: A Mandate for Change*, Appleton-Century-Crofts, ed. div., 1973, pp. 132-136.

14 Jaimes, M. Annette, "The Myth of Indian Education in the American Education System," *Action in Teacher Education: The Journal of the Association of Teachers* (Special Issue on Women and Minorities), Vol. V, No. 3, Fall 1983, pp. 15-19.

15 Churchill, Ward, "White Studies: The Intellectual Imperialism of Contemporary US Education," *Integrateducation* (Special Issue on American Indian Education), Vol. XIX, Nos. 1-2, University of Massachusetts/Amherst, January 1982, pp. 51-57.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

17 Deloria, Vine Jr., "Education and Imperialism," *Integrateducation*, op. cit., p. 58.

18 Thornton, 1978, op. cit., p. 11.

19 *The College Blue Book*, New York: MacMillan Publishers, 1983. The states in question are Alaska, Arizona, California, Illinois, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin.

20 Examples of the sort of program at issue here are the program at Dartmouth (one of the oldest in the nation) and at Cornell (one of the newest). The states involved are Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, and Oregon.

21 *Directory of American Indian Higher Education Programs*, American Indian Studies Center, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM, 1980.

22 Jaimes, op. cit., p. 17.

23 See, for example, Churchill, Ward, "Implications of Publishing *The Roots of Resistance*: Observations on the Work of Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz," *The Journal of*

Ethnic Studies, Vol. 9, No. 3, Western Washington University, Bellingham, 1981, and "A Critique of Vine Deloria, Jr., The Metaphysics of Modern Existence," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 3, American Indian Studies Center, UCLA, 1980, p. 61.

24 Churchill, Ward, "National Patterns in Contemporary Indian Studies Programs," *Multicultural Education and the American Indian*, American Indian Studies Center, UCLA, 1980, p. 61.

25 Mohawk, John, "Towards an Indian Intelligentsia," unpublished keynote address delivered at American Indian Awareness Week, Cornell University, October 3, 1984.

26 Churchill, Ward, "White Studies or Isolation: An Alternative Model for Native American Studies Programs," *American Indian Issues in Higher Education*, American Indian Studies Center, UCLA, 1981, p. 29.

27 Fanon, Frantz, *Toward the African Revolution*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967.

28 Bonfil Batalla, Guillermo, *Utopia y Revolucion: El Pensamiento Politico Contemponareo de los Indios en America Latina*, Mexico City: Editorial Nueva Imagen, SA, 1981.

29 For example, see Melody, Michael, "Lakota Myth and Government: The Cosmos as the State," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 3, American Indian Studies Center, UCLA, 1980, pp. 1-20.

30 See Churchill, Ward, "Indigenous Peoples of the US: A Struggle Against Internal Colonialism," *The Black Scholar*, Vol. 16, No. 1, San Francisco, 1985 and "Examination and Analysis of the Implications of US Policy Within the Navajo-Hopi Joint Use Area Under Provisions of International Law," *Akwesasne Notes*, Vol. 17, Nos. 3-6, Mohawk Nation via Rooseveltown, NY, 1985. Of related interest is his "The 'Trial' of Leonard Peltier" in Messerschmidt, Jim, *The Trial of Leonard Peltier*, Boston: South End Press, 1983, pp. v-xv.

31 Durham, Jimmie, *Columbus Day*, Minneapolis: West End Press, 1984. Durham was the founding director of the International Indian Treaty Council.

32 Dunbar Ortiz, Roxanne, *Indians of the Americas: Human Rights and Self-Determination*, London, Zed Press, 1984.

33 See, in particular, Dunbar Ortiz, Roxanne, *The Roots of Resistance: Land Tenure in New Mexico, 1680-1980*, American Indian Studies Center, UCLA, 1980. Also see her *The Great Sioux Nation; Sitting in Judgment on America*, New York/San Francisco: International Indian Treaty Council/Moon Books, 1977 and "Wounded Knee 1890 to Wounded Knee 1973: A Study of United States Colonialism," *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Western Washington University, Bellingham, 1980.

34 Barriero, Jose, "The Dilemma of American Indian Education," *Indian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, American Indian Studies Program, Cornell University, 1984, pp. 4-5.

35 LaFrance, Ron, "The Symbology of Development: Some Iroquoian Thoughts," *Indian Studies* Vol. 2, No. 1, American Indian Studies Program, Cornell University, 1985, pp. 20-23.

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